

THE SARMATIAN DISCOVERIES FROM RIPCENI – LA STÂNCĂ (BOTOȘANI COUNTY/RO): TWO GRAVES AND MANY QUESTIONS

Abstract: The present paper aims to analyse two graves and other stray finds dated to the Roman period and discovered in 1979 and 1983 in the site of Ripiceni – La Stâncă (Botoșani County/RO). Grave 1 belongs to an adult female (around 55-60 years old) with the skull intentionally deformed in the first years after her birth. The *calvaria* of the deceased no. 2 (a child around 2-3 years old) had also traces of artificial deformation. The morphology of both skeletons and the funerary inventory (beads, astragals, ceramics, etc.) can be associated with the Sarmatian culture. Based on analogies one can date the two graves from Ripiceni – La Stâncă during the second half of the 2nd century – 3rd century AD. Probably this features are only a small part of a bigger cemetery destroyed by the animal farm complex constructed in the communist era.

Keywords: *Roman period, graves, Sarmatians, intentional cranial deformation, East Carpathians, Ripiceni – La Stâncă.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 Maria Diaconescu published the funerary inventory of a grave dated to the Roman period and attributed to the Sarmatian culture¹. The grave was discovered by chance in 1979, in the site of Ripiceni – La Stâncă (Botoșani County) and rescued by the archaeologist Alexandru Păunescu. There is no information about the funerary rituals (skeleton orientation, pit layouts, funeral offerings, etc.), because the workers who discovered the grave have destroyed most of the human remains.

The present paper aims to re-discuss this grave (and the related funerary material) and to analyse the human remains preserved in the County Museum of Botoșani, bones discovered in the site of Ripiceni – La Stâncă in 1979 and 1983, which have not been published or mentioned to date. Also, within the Botoșani Museum storage room we managed to find four ceramic vessels (stray finds) that come from the same site, which were found in 1983, together with the skeleton of a child.

LOCATION OF THE SITE

Ripiceni commune is located in the northeast part of Romania, on the right bank of the Prut River (Pl. I). In the paper from 2013, Maria Diaconescu mentions that the grave no. 1 was discovered in 'Ripiceni commune, inside the IAS Zootechnical Farm Complex, at Stâncă'². This location was also mentioned

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¹ DIACONESCU 2013.

² DIACONESCU 2013, 8: 'comuna Ripiceni, în incinta Complexului zootehnic al Fermei IAS, la Stâncă'.

in other studies dedicated to the Sarmatian material from Botoșani County³.

In the Archaeological Repertory of Botoșani County this spot with funerary discoveries (RAN code 38036.07) is described as the 'Sarmatian cemetery from Sadoveni – La Stâncă' (Sadoveni town), an out-of-town site, located inside the former IAS Stâncă – Ripiceni Zootechnical Farm, site identified by Alexandru Păunescu in 1979 on the occasion of the sewerage works inside the former farm, when a skeleton was found by chance⁴. Obviously, we are dealing with one and the same site, located north of Ripiceni commune, in the proximity of the Prut bank. The multitude of toponyms is due to the administrative reorganization from the communist period of the Ripiceni – Sadoveni area and the construction of a dam downstream of Ripiceni, in the locality of Stâncă, where a huge accumulation lake was formed. In this paper we have chosen to use the toponyms Ripiceni – La Stâncă, because under this name were published for the first time the funerary discoveries.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNERARY INVENTORY

Grave 1 (M1/1979)

It was as discovered by chance in 1979; it belonged to an adult female around 55-60 years old⁵ and had the following (recovered) inventory:

Fragments from one or several brooches (foot, spring and needle), possible the type with returned foot; currently in the museum, the brooch fragments are in a worse condition than in 2013 (Pl. II/1).

Fragments of two bronze earrings (?) with a bent extremity, possibly of the type of circular earrings with closure in the loop-hook technique; preserved dimensions: L⁶ = 2.5 cm, L (the second one) = 2.4 cm (Pl. II/2).

Ceramic spindle whorl of concave-truncated cone shape made of grey-red paste and covered with engobe; H = 3 cm; Dmax = 4 cm (Pl. II/3).

Fragments from a small, reddish-brown bitronconic vessel, made by hand from coarse paste, with a black-grey core, which preserves on the area of maximum diameter the traces of a handle; Dmax = 8.2 cm; Dr = 5 cm (Pl. II/4a-b).

197 glass beads, as follows: 62 made of blue glass, Gr. V/1, D = 4-8 mm; 21 made of blue glass, Gr. I/B/2, D = 8-11 mm; 36 made of white glass, Gr. I/B/1, D = 7-12 mm (some slightly bitronconic in shape); 6 made of green glass, Gr. I/B/3, D = 7-9 mm; 7 made of white glass, Gr. III/1, H = 8-13 mm; 13 very small beads, made of white glass, Gr. I/A/1, D = 4-5 mm; 1 bead made of white glass, Gr. IV/B/1, H = 9 mm; 47 very small beads, made of green glass, Gr. I/1/2, D = 2-3 mm; 4 connected beads caught in series of two, made of orange glass, Gr. II/1, H = 12 mm (Pl. III). There is no information regarding the inventory' position inside the grave⁷.

³ See for example CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 4, 16-17.

⁴ <http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=sadoveni-manoleasa-botosani-necropola-sarmatica-de-la-sadoveni-la-stanca-cod-sit-ran-38036.07>.

⁵ See below the bio-anthropological analyses.

⁶ In this study we have used the following abbreviations: L = length, H = height, D = diameter, Dr = rim diameter, Db = bottom diameter, Dmax = maximum diameter.

⁷ The description of the inventory was made after DIACONESCU 2013, 8-9, with additions.

Grave 2 (M2/1983)

It was discovered in 1983. We have no information about the position of the skeleton inside the grave or data about the funerary rituals. Only the skeleton of the deceased (a child around 2-3 years old) and the following items have been preserved in the depository of the museum:

A perforated astragalus, probably used as a pendant, H = 3.1 cm, L = 2 cm (Pl. IV/1).

A fragmented astragalus, H = 3 cm, L = 1.4 cm (Pl. IV/2).

Stray finds from the cemetery

Moreover, in the collection of the Botoșani Museum there are four ceramic vessels that have as provenience ('stray finds from 1983') the same archaeological site from Ripiceni – La Stâncă⁸. It is highly possible that these pots were found in graves. They are small (mostly 7-10 cm high) and they are preserved as whole – usually the characteristics of funerary vessels.

Wheel-thrown bowl, made of fine, grey paste (however with many gaps resulting from the combustion process), fired in a reducing atmosphere; rim profiled and slightly flared outwards, annular bottom; H = 7.4 cm, Dr = 15 cm; Db = 6 cm (Pl. IV/1).

Wheel-thrown cup fitted with a handle, made of fine, grey paste (however with many gaps resulting from the combustion process), fired in a reducing atmosphere; rim profiled and slightly flared outwards, high neck, annular bottom; H = 9.7 cm, Dr = 7 cm; Db = 5.3 cm (Pl. IV/2).

Wheel-thrown cup fitted with a handle (similar to the previous one), made of fine, grey paste (however with many gaps resulting from the combustion process), fired in a reducing atmosphere; shows traces of debris (and possibly secondary combustion) at the bottom; rim profiled and slightly flared outwards, high neck, annular bottom; H = 8.4 cm, Dr = 5.7 cm; Db = 5 cm (Pl. V/1).

Wheel-thrown cup fitted with a fragmented handle (broken since antiquity), made of fine, grey paste and fired in a reducing atmosphere; rim wide, flattened, slightly flared outwards; high neck and annular bottom; H = 19 cm, Dr = 11 cm; Db = 8.5 cm (Pl. IV/2)⁹.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SKELETONS

The anthropological analysis were performed following these main stages: determination of the laterality of the bones¹⁰, the state of preservation¹¹ and degree of representation¹², identification of taphonomic changes¹³, estimation of biological age at the time of death and determining the gender of the deceased¹⁴, sampling

⁸ In the register of the Botoșani County Museum, the vessels were registered as coming from Ripiceni – Ferma Nr. 10. This represents another toponym of the site Ripiceni – La Stâncă / Ripiceni – Complexului zootehnic al Fermei IAS / Sadoveni – La Stâncă.

⁹ The four vessels were also mention in CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 16 (No. 4-6), 17 (No. 7), but in the form of an exhibition catalogue, with photos, but without drawings or further information.

¹⁰ WHITE/FOLKENS 2005, 75-308.

¹¹ CONNELL 2008.

¹² BUIKSTRA/UBELAKER 1994, 5-8.

¹³ BUIKSTRA/UBELAKER 1994, 95-106.

¹⁴ SCHAEFER *et alii* 2009; PÉRIER 1949; NEMESKÉRI *et alii* 1960; FEREMBACH *et alii* 1979; UBELAKER 1979, 72-80, 93-114; SMITH/

biometric data and noting morphoscopic observations¹⁵, identification of possible traumas, anomalies, dental and bone pathologies¹⁶, identification and interpretation of musculoskeletal stress markers and enthesopathic changes¹⁷.

Grave 1 (M1/1979)

The degree of representation and state of preservation.

The skeleton is partially preserved. From the cranial segment there are numerous fragments from the frontal, parietals, occipital, the left temporal, the right zygomatic and the mandible, to which we can add two isolated teeth from the lower arch (the right P_1 and the left P_2). The neurocranium was partially reconstructed (Pl. VIII/2-5). From the postcranial segment were preserved fragments of coxae, ribs, clavulae, scapulae, vertebrae (bodies and apophyses), femora (the right one completed), patellae, tibiae, fibulae, humeri, radii, ulnae, carpals, metacarpals, tarsals, metatarsals, hand and foot phalanges (Pl. VIII/1). Despite the high degree of fragmentation, the state of preservation of the human bones is satisfying.

Estimation of the biological age and determination of the gender.

The advanced degree of degenerative changes, joint surfaces of the sacrum and ilia (Pl. IX/1), the osteoporotic appearance of the bone tissue in the epiphyses of the femur and humerus, completely closed cranial sutures and the state of the dentition on the lower arch indicate a biological age (in the time of death) between 55-60 years (old adult or *maturus III*). The pronounced gracility of the bones, the characteristics of the pelvis and those of the skull indicate, undoubtedly, the female gender.

Morphometric characteristics of the skull.

The neurocranium is long (*g-op*: 181 mm, *g-i*: 163 mm, *g-l*: 172 mm) and very wide. The forehead is prominent and also very wide (*ft-ft*: 110 mm, *co-co*: 138 mm), slightly inclined, with pronounced eminences. The cranial relief is slightly marked (glabella: 1-2, supraciliary: 1, occipital: 0-1, mandibular: moderate). The occipital is slightly convex in the post-lambdic area (Pl. VIII/2-5). The zygomatics have moderate dimensions (Pl. VIII/8). The mastoid process is not voluminous (Pl. VIII/9). The mandible is very gracile, moderately wide (*go-go*: 94 mm) and vaguely shallow (65 mm). Beyond the fact that the lower arch is edentulous in the molars area, we can notice other features of the mandible: very short body (*id-gn*: 22 mm) and thin, wiped symphysis with button appearance, short (61 mm) and large (29 mm) ramus (Pl. VIII/7).

Intentional cranial deformation.

In the case of grave 1 we are dealing most likely with an artificially deformed skull during life, in the first years after birth. Unfortunately, the many missing parts, which led

to a not very accurate reconstruction of the *calvaria*, urges us to be careful in further interpretations. However, both with the naked eye and by touch, in the immediately post-coronal area can be observed the only deviation present: a fairly wide transverse depression, about 4-5 cm (Pl. VIII/3). Most likely, it is a low-intensity, circular deformation of the skull¹⁸.

The postcranial skeleton.

The skeleton is gracile and its skeletal stature – calculated according to the only unbroken bone (the right femur, Pl. IX/4) – is 152 cm, which corresponds to the sub-middle female category.

Dental anomalies and pathologies.

Dental health, appreciated only after the lower arcade (the only one preserved), is precarious. The masticatory areas (M_1 and M_2) are completely edentulous, as is the frontal one (I_1 and probably I_2 ; Pl. VIII/7). The third molars (M_3) show congenital absence, i.e. they are missing due to non-formation of buds. Dental crown wear could be appreciated only in the case of dental elements present in an isolated state. The right P_1 has the crown consumed almost entirely. The left P_2 presents a moderately worn crown and a consistent layer of cream-colored supra-gingival calculus, extremely adherent to tooth enamel (Pl. VIII/6).

Bone abnormalities and pathologies.

On the internal cranial layer, in the frontal region, there is a grooved porosity, which indicates the presence of an inflammation and / or bleeding of the meninges, active at the time of death (Pl. VIII/10). Degenerative changes, related in this case to the advanced age of the individual, are present at the level of all joints, being more accentuated at the level of the coxofemoral joint (bilateral; Pl. IX/2, 5) and at the level of hand bones.

Occupational stress markers.

Pronounced muscle insertions were identified on the clavulae and on the humeri (Pl. IX/3), which suggests that this woman performed activities that overloaded her arms muscles. In addition, both femurs have pronounced pilastry (112 u.i.) (Pl. IX/6) – a good indicator of biomechanical stress at the level of the lower limbs, well correlated with terrestrial mobility, i.e. with biomechanical stress caused by long walking on uneven and bumpy ground and by keeping the body in a vertical position for a long time.

Taphonomic data.

All the ruptures and cracks that led to the fragmentation of the skeletal elements are produced postmortem (post-exhumation), mostly recently and only a few in antiquity. Some bones are exfoliated (subaerial weathering), such as radius, ulna or fibula. Traces of metal oxides, most likely from ornaments deposited in the temple region, have been identified on the right mandibular condyle (Pl. VIII/7), the left mastoid process (Pl. VIII/9) and the right zygomatic (Pl. VIII/8).

Grave 2 (M2/1983)

The degree of representation and state of preservation.

The degree of fragmentation is accentuated, mainly due to the fragility of the skeletal components. From the cranial segment, only parts of the frontal, parietals and

KNIGHT 1984; BUIKSTRA/UBELAKER 1994, 15-46; BRUZEK 2002; WALRATH *et alii* 2004; SCHMITT 2005; LATHAM/FINNEGAN 2010.

¹⁵ MARTIN/SALLER 1957-1966; BUIKSTRA/UBELAKER 1994, 69-84; ALEKSEEV/DEBETZ 1964, 112-127; TROTTER/GLESER 1958.

¹⁶ MAYS 1998, 102-181; AUFDERHEIDE/RODRIGUEZ-MARTIN 1998; ORTNER 2003; MANN/HUNT 2005; ROBERTS/MANCHESTER 2007; KATZENBERG/SAUNDERS 2008; BRICKLEY/IVES 2008; WALDRON 2009; BARNES 2012.

¹⁷ PÁLFI/DUTOIR 1996; ROBB 1998; MANN/HUNT 2005, 203-211; MOLLESON 2007.

¹⁸ IMBELONI 1933, 214.

occipital have been preserved, and from the postcranial segment, fragments of the left scapula and the diaphyses of the femora, humeri, right radius and right ulna (Pl. X/1). The cranial segment was reconstituted till the *calvaria* (Pl. X/2-5). The state of conservation of the preserved bones is precarious.

Estimation of the biological age and determination of the gender.

The skeleton belongs to a subadult individual, who at the time of death had a biological age of about 2-3 years (infant or *infans I*). If we take into account the dimensions of the frontal (chord *g-b*: 103 mm, arch *g-b*: 115 mm) and parietals (chord *b-l*: 123 mm, arch *b-l*: 135 mm), the age would be slightly lower, ca. 12-18 months. However, given the appearance of the anterior fontanelle, which is completely closed (Pl. X/4-5) and the fact that the skull head has numerous post-mortem damage (which could cause dimensional errors), we consider that the biological age is slightly more advanced than that estimation based on biometric data.

Bone abnormalities or pathologies.

On the external cranial layer (on the frontal, parietals and occipital) can be distinguished porotic hyperostosis – exocranial porosity (*cribra cranii*) caused by a hyperplasia and hypertrophy of bone tissue. The process was active at the time of death (Pl. X/3-7). The porosities on the *tabula externa ossis cranii* were developed especially during early childhood and may suggest various food deficiencies, hypervascularizations or inflammatory processes caused by trauma, but may also occur as a result of secondary spreads of inflammatory processes. These porous-trabecular lesions are most commonly reported on skeletons from young children (0-3 years), their diet being sometimes inadequate in terms of quality and / or quantity. In addition, this population group has an increased susceptibility to gastrointestinal diseases, both during breastfeeding and especially during weaning.

In addition, on the internal cranial layer, in the region of the frontal and parietals there are a series of changes that may indicate the presence of an inflammation and / or bleeding of the meninges, also active at the time of death (Pl. X/8). Due to the fragility of the skull head, the affected areas were perforated post-mortem.

Intentional cranial deformation.

The *calvaria* of the deceased no. 2 had traces of artificial deformation. Even if the normal cranial architecture is not much altered, the traces of ligatures are much clearer compared to the case presented above (Grave 1). They are easily distinguished on both parietals by pronounced post-coronal depression (Pl. X/2-3, 5) and in this case we refer to a low to medium intensity, circular deformation¹⁹.

Taphonomic data.

All the ruptures and cracks that led to the fragmentation of the skeletal parts are produced recently, post-mortem (post-exhumation) and only a few in antiquity. Some cranial fragments are exfoliated (subaerial weathering; Pl. X/4, 7). The postcranial fragments show a blackish pigmentation, both on the external and on the internal

(medullary) (Pl. X/9-11); a situation that leads us to assume that during the decomposition process, the body of the deceased came into contact with a burnt layer.

SOME NOTES ABOUT

THE INTENTIONAL CRANIAL DEFORMATION

In Europe, the international cranial deformation has been known since the 5th-4th centuries BC, but in the Carpathian regions this custom spread with the arrival of nomadic populations, being brought – among many others – by Sarmatian tribes. With the advance of the Sarmatians to the west, the area of the deformed skulls expanded, and in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD it became a habit²⁰ and a marker of the Sarmatian *ethnos*²¹.

However, it is considered that on the territory on nowadays Romania this custom was not a mass phenomenon and N. Mirițoiu believes that only 17-20% of the examined skulls were artificially deformed²². Based on data available in 2005 – when the anthropologist N. Mirițoiu, in his doctoral thesis (defended in 2012) made the only repertoire of skeletons with artificially deformed skulls discovered in Romania – 61 sites were known with cca. 155 intentionally deformed skulls and from which only 130 were confirmed by anthropologists. Most discoveries (in somewhat equal proportions) belong to the Sarmatians (31 skulls), the Roman-Byzantine necropolises (31 skulls) and the early medieval necropolises of the Dridu type (27 skulls), followed by the Hunnic (5 skulls), Gepid graves (7 skulls), late medieval (3 skulls) and contemporary graves (one skull)²³.

Regarding the type of cranial deformation, two main types were documented in Romania: a) circular, made with bandages, with two main varieties (erect and oblique), depending on the direction of the bandages and constrictor belts, as well as depending on their width (i.e. skull surface covered); b) tabular (made with the help of the swing). 84.7% of the analysed skeletons have variants of the circular type (oblique and erect), while the tabular type (only erect) has 8.10% cases (of which six skulls belong to the Sarmatians). In the craniological series with artificial deformation attributed to the Sarmatians, predominates the circular type with its erect variant²⁴, as it is in the case of the two graves from Ripiceni – La Stâncă analyzed in our paper.

Regarding the discoveries in Romania, it is assumed that the custom of artificial deformation was applied especially to children of female gender²⁵. In fact, it is considered that for the late Sarmatian populations between the Volga and the Don, circular cranial deformation was practiced especially for females and exceptionally amongst the male population²⁶.

From an anthropological perspective, the closest analogies for the two graves from Ripiceni we refer to the following cemeteries (with intentional deformation of

²⁰ MIRIȚOIU 2005, 125-131.

²¹ FIRȘTEJN 1970, 146; BALABANOVA 2001; MIRIȚOIU 2005, 125-131; BATIEVA 2013.

²² MIRIȚOIU 2005, 152-153.

²³ Other six were did not have a clear chronological time frame (MIRIȚOIU 2005, 155-182).

²⁴ MIRIȚOIU 2005, 153-154.

²⁵ MIRIȚOIU 2005, 152-153.

²⁶ BALABANOVA 2001, 108.

¹⁹ IMBELONI 1933, 214.

the skull): Pogorăști²⁷, Drăgușeni, Trușești²⁸, Botoșani²⁹, Broscăuți³⁰, Mitoc³¹ (all in Botoșani county/RO), Poienești (Vaslui County/RO)³², Trestiana (Vaslui County/RO), Proboța (Iași County/RO)³³, Isaiia (Iași County/RO)³⁴, Galați (Galați County/RO)³⁵, and Șendreni (Galați County/RO)³⁶. To these we can add the discoveries from the Prut-Dniester area, which so far add up to 25 artificially deformed skulls attributed to the Sarmatian population during the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD³⁷.

SOME NOTES ABOUT THE FUNERARY INVENTORY

The most numerous and diverse category of grave goods discovered in the cemetery of Ripiceni – La Stâncă is represented by beads (197 items). They were discovered in the female grave (grave 1). From a typological point of view, beads can be classified into five main groups. Only the group of globular beads (Gr. I) presents several chromatic variants (Pl. III/1). The most numerous are the bitronconic beads made of blue glass (62 items; Gr. V/1), the very small (D = 2-3 mm) globular, green glass (47 items; Gr. I/1/2) and the larger globular beads of white glass (36 items, Gr. I/B/1). All these types are common for the 2nd-early 4th centuries AD, both east and west of the Carpathians³⁸. Unfortunately, we do not have any information regarding their position on the skeleton, if they were sewn on clothes (after the Oriental fashion) or if they were worn as necklaces.

Beads are the most numerous pieces of grave goods documented in the funerary features attributed to the Sarmatian culture, being registered hundreds or even thousands of items in the women's graves. For example, in a contemporaneous cemetery (dated during the second half of the 2nd century – middle of the 3rd century AD) from Mitoc – Malu Galben (Botoșani County/RO) more than 1730 beads were found in the five female graves³⁹, being mainly embroidered on the dress, lower edge of trousers and high shoes top / boots. Unfortunately, east of the Carpathians a large percentage of the beads recovered from graves were considered mass material, neglected or published in a general manner, without typologies, descriptions, statistics or even without mentioning their total number. An exception is the Mitoc – Malu Galben cemetery where more than 1730 were processed⁴⁰. The beads from Ripiceni grave 1 find their perfect analogies within the cemetery from Mitoc, especially

the bitronconic and globular beads of small dimensions (Pl. VII/2).

In grave 1 from Ripiceni some metal fragments were also found: the foot, spring and needle from one or more bronze brooches (Pl. II/1) and fragments from two bronze earrings (?), with a bent end (Pl. II/2). Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the items prevents us from establishing the exact type and dating of the pieces.

Regarding the ceramic vessels discovered at Ripiceni, we find numerous analogies in graves attributed to the Sarmatian culture and dated during the 2nd-3rd centuries AD. In this study, we insist especially on the discoveries from the vicinity of Ripiceni commune. From grave 1 from the above mentioned cemetery came a small handmade vessel (Pl. II/4). This has a perfect analogy in a neighbour cemetery from Mitoc – Malu Galben/RO (grave 2), cemetery dated – as we have previously mentioned – during the second half of the 2nd century – middle of the 3rd century AD⁴¹. Also, the wheel-thrown cups, discovered by chance on the territory of the Ripiceni – La Stâncă cemetery have analogies in numerous Sarmatian funerary contexts on the territory of Botoșani County, such as the cemeteries from Hănești – La Val⁴², Vlăsănești – La Iaz⁴³, Vorniceni⁴⁴, Dângenii⁴⁵.

In grave 1 from Ripiceni another ceramic item was discovered: a spindle whorl of truncated cone shape made of grey-red paste and covered with engobe (Pl. II/3). East of the Carpathians, spindle-whorls are often documented in graves⁴⁶, especially associated with females. They are deposited usually in a single specimen (rarely two or more), in the hands and knee area of the deceased⁴⁷, thus suggesting the way that the spindle was used in daily life. Most spindle-whorls are made out of clay, of truncated cone shape and more rarely of spherical or bitronconic shape (of approximately equal halves).

The only funerary inventories of the child grave (grave 2) were two astragals (talus bones). In general, the astragals are assigned to sheep, some of them being perforated, therefore worn as pendants and probably amulets, similar to the specimen discovered in grave 2 from Ripiceni. East of the Carpathians, such discoveries are rarely attested in graves attributed to the Sarmatian culture, dated between the second half of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd century AD, such as those from Bădragii Vechi/MD, T 23 G 10 (the grave of a teenager, with five astragals, all perforated), Bădragii Vechi/MD, T 25 G 4 (grave of a teenager, with 24 such items), Beljaevka/UA, T 1 G 4a (teenager's grave with 77 astragals), and Șerbăca/MD, T 3 G 3 (child's grave with unknown number of finds)⁴⁸.

To the south and west of the Carpathians, the astragals are even rarer. We mentioned in this context the discoveries

²⁷ CRISTESCU 1964.

²⁸ NECRASOV *et alii* 1967.

²⁹ NECRASOV/ANTONIU 1979.

³⁰ VORNICU-ȚERNA *et alii* 2020.

³¹ GRUMEZA 2020.

³² IONIȚĂ 1982, 68; BICHIR 1972, 142.

³³ ZAHARIA/ZAHARIA 1962; IONIȚĂ 1982, 11-13, 84.

³⁴ URSULESCU/KOGĂLNICEANU 2007; MIU 2007.

³⁵ NICOLĂESCU-PLOȘOR 1979.

³⁶ BICHIR 1972.

³⁷ GROSU 1995, 150; SIMALCSIK 2015; POPOVICI *et alii* 2015.

³⁸ For example, such beads were produced on the western border of Roman Dacia in *Tibiscum* workshops; see Benea types II, IV, V, and VIII (BENEA 2004). Thus, such beads were in fashion in that period, not only in *Barbaricum*, but also in the Roman provinces from the Lower Danube.

³⁹ Grave 1: 149 beads (and other fragments); Grave 3: more than 683 beads; Grave 7: 106 beads; Grave 8: 792 beads; Grave 9: unknown number (GRUMEZA 2020)

⁴⁰ GRUMEZA 2020 – the material is in press.

⁴¹ CHIRICA 1979, 631, Fig. 2/19.

⁴² CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 17, No. 9; 18, Nr. 10.

⁴³ FOIT 1970: 667-669, Fig. 1/3-6; CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 18, No. 11-12.

⁴⁴ DIACONESCU 2013, 10 Fig. 4/6; CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 20, No. 16.

⁴⁵ CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 20, No. 17.

⁴⁶ See for examples the graves from Tirgșor/RO, no. 184, 198, 200 (DIACONU 1965, 20, 23), Prăjeni – Țarină, T2, G9, Liveni – Lutărie, Vorniceni – Pod Ibăneasa (CIUCĂLĂU 2019, 40, No. 67-69), Ștefănești/RO, Epureni/RO, Proboța/RO, Largu/RO, etc. (see further in BICHIR 1972, 156).

⁴⁷ DIACONU 1965, 23.

⁴⁸ See more recently a cataloguing of such items in BĂRCĂ 2006, 137; BĂRCĂ/SYMONENKO 2009, 166, 244.

from Târgșor/RO, grave 196 where two lamb astragals appear, next to a skeleton of a mature man (dated in the 3rd century AD) with intentional deformation of the skull⁴⁹, or a unique discovery from Hungary: an astragal with a *tamga* sign discovered in a pit from site no. 133 from Gyoma – Ailer téglagyár/HU⁵⁰. It is supposed that such items are part of ceremonial rituals, element of the funeral decorations, part of games and fortune telling sets, or possible amulets and protective symbols during transition to the other world⁵¹.

FINAL REMARKS

Based on analogies one can date the two graves from Ripiceni – La Sâncă during the second half of the 2nd century – 3rd century AD. They are contemporaneous (or partially contemporaneous) with other discoveries from Botoșani County attributed to the Sarmatian culture – more than 20 cemeteries and stray finds from funerary features⁵². Further, the morphology of the skeletons (especially the custom of cranial deformation), the accessories and dress items have analogies in the 2nd – 3rd centuries cemeteries from north and north-west of the Black Sea, sites traditionally attributed to the Sarmatian nomads.

Probably the graves from Ripiceni – La Sâncă are only a small part of a bigger cemetery destroyed by the animal farm complex constructed in the communist era (Pl. I/3). The stray finds from the '80 (i.e. the funerary pottery characteristic to 3rd century AD; Pl. V-VI) could be a proof that we are dealing with a cemetery used by a community over more than one generation. However, many questions still remain, among which the most crucial are: how large was the community that used this cemetery? Where did they come from? Did they bury themselves in flat graves or in barrow graves?

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⁴⁹ DIACONU 1965, 21.

⁵⁰ ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 2006, 182, Fig. 2/3.

⁵¹ GRISHCHUK 2013.

⁵² See a recent cataloguing of these funerary features in DIACONESCU 2013 and CIUCĂLĂU 2018.

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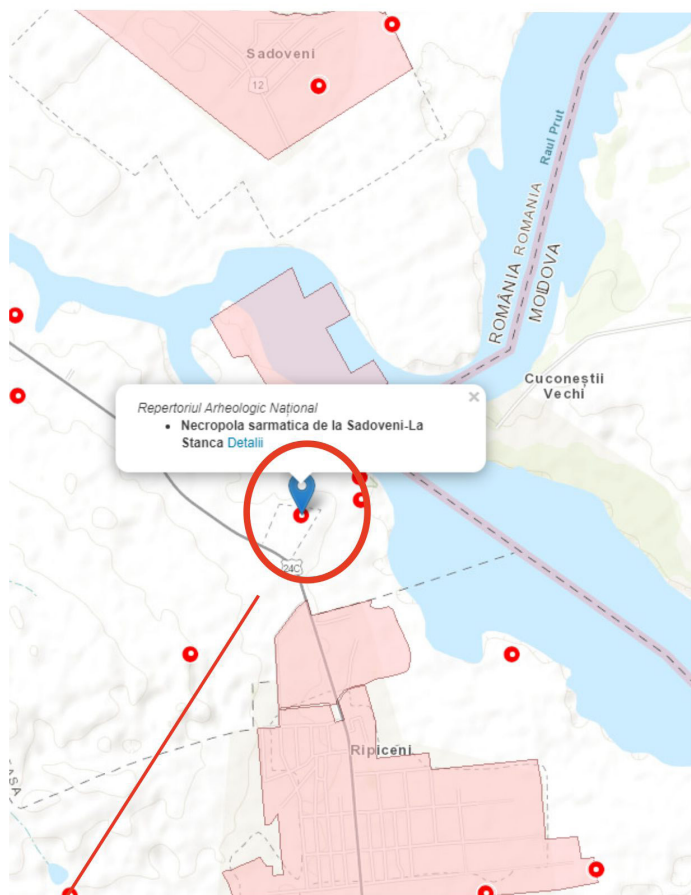
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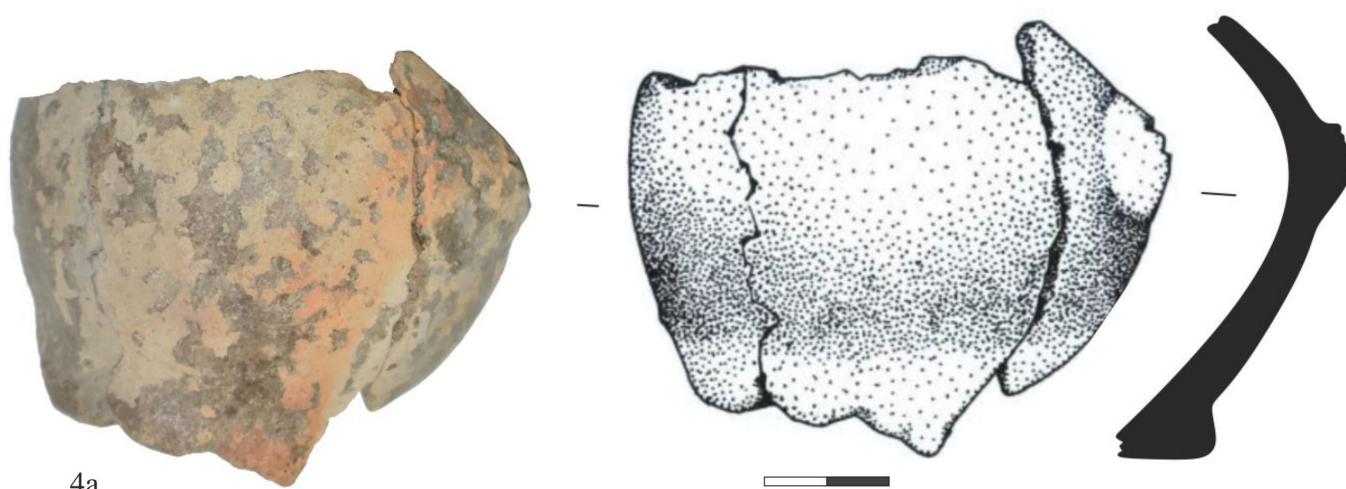
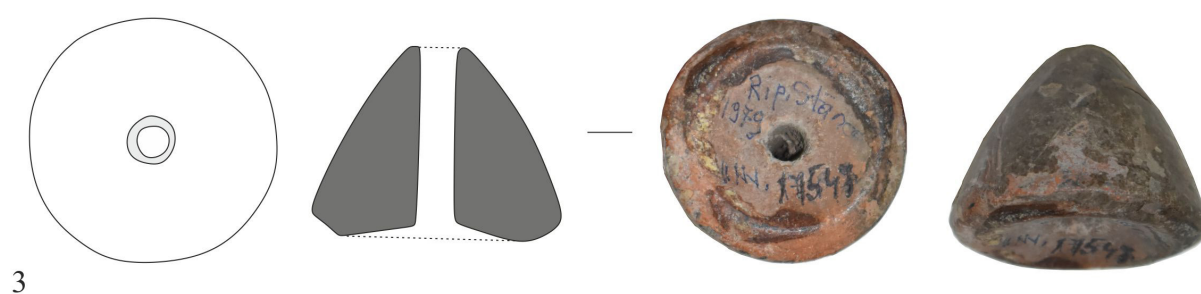


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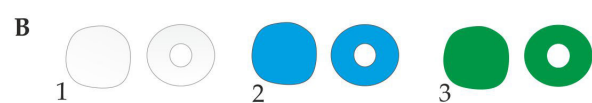
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Pl. I. The location of Ripiceni – La Stâncă site (after www.cimec.ro & www.google.ro/maps, with additions).

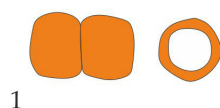


PL. II. Ripiceni – La Stâncă, inventory of Grave 1 (redraw after DIACONESCU 2013; Photos © Botoșani County Museum).

Group I



Group II



Group III



Group IV



Group V



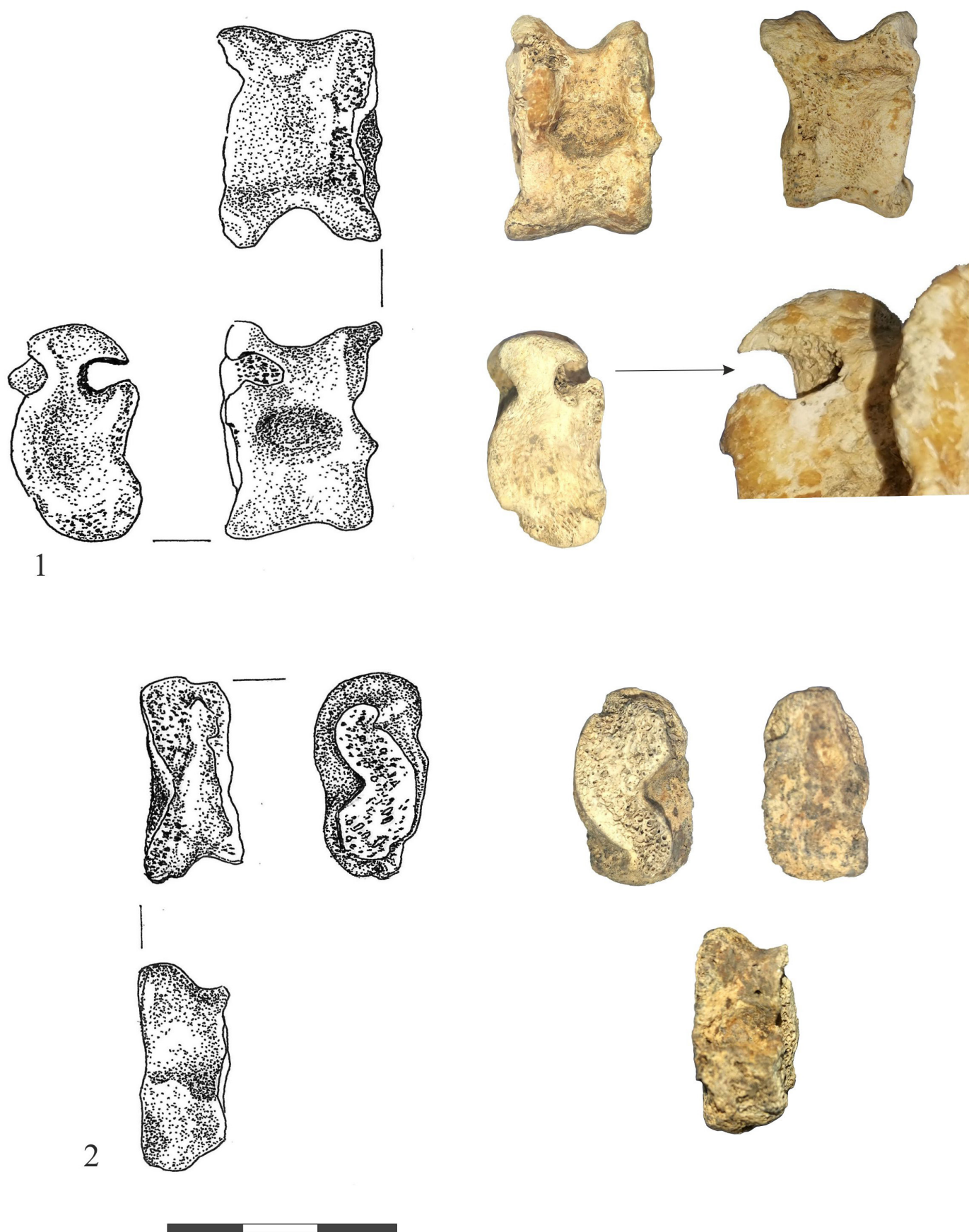
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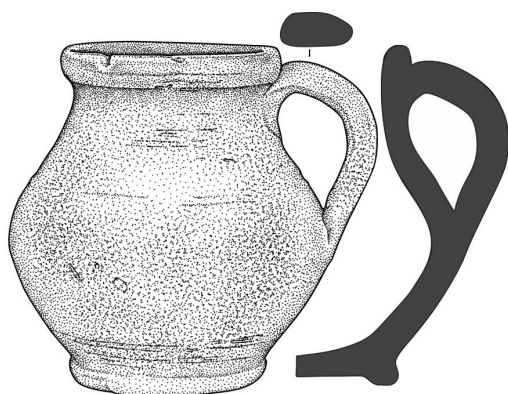
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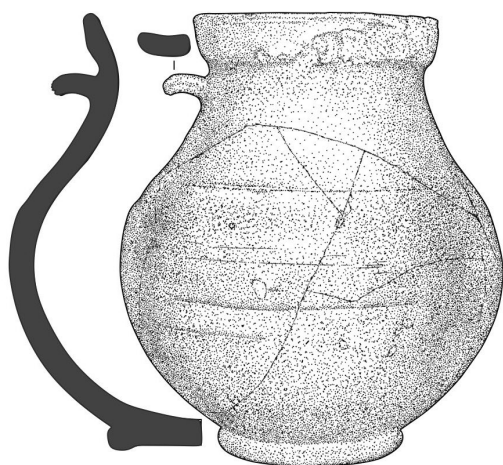
Pl. III. 1. Ripiceni – La Stâncă, types of glass beads documented in Grave 1 (drawings: L. Grumeza); **2.** Photos of the glass beads (© Botoșani County Museum).



Pl. IV. Ripiceni – La Stâncă, inventory of grave 2 (drawings: R. Ionescu; photos © Botoșani County Museum).



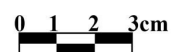
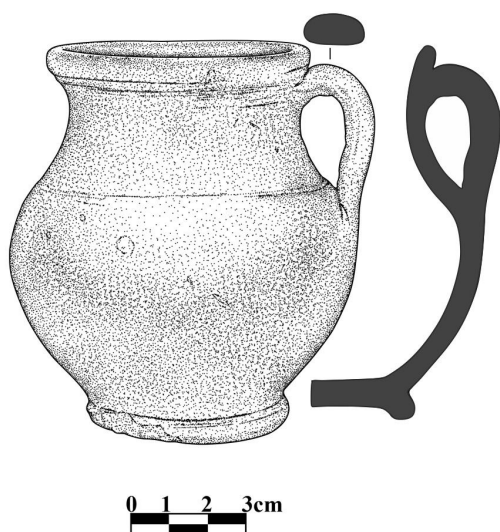
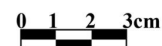
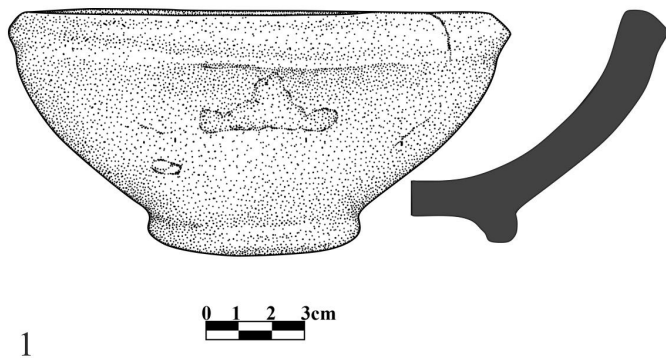
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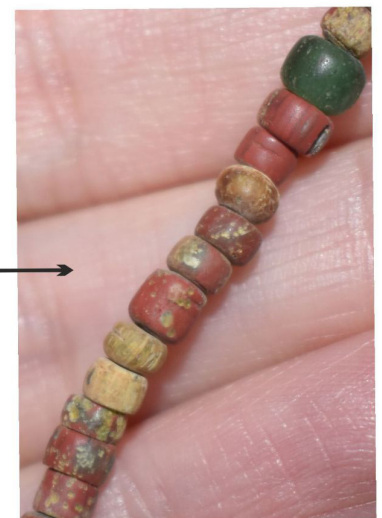
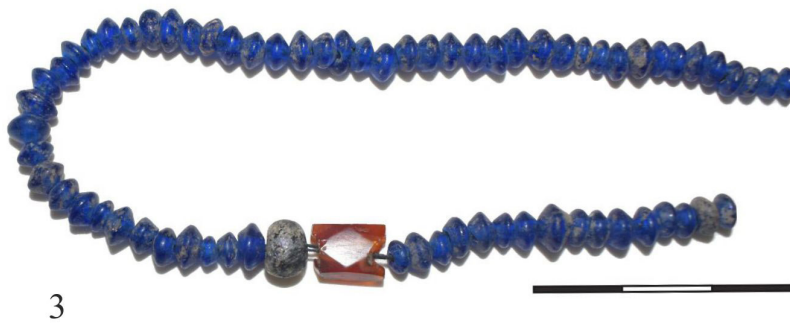
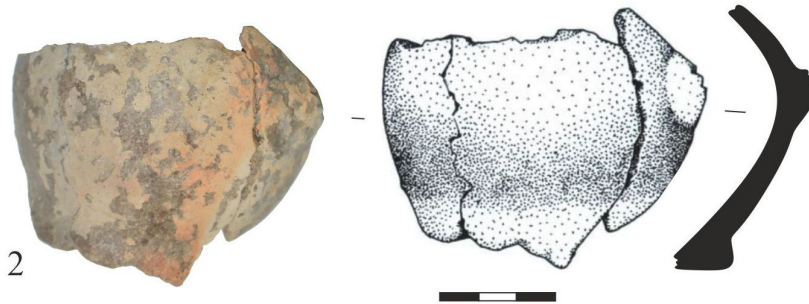
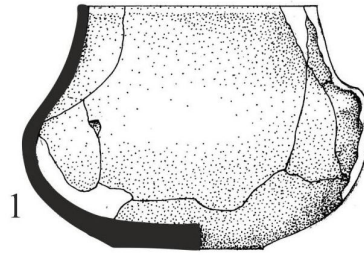
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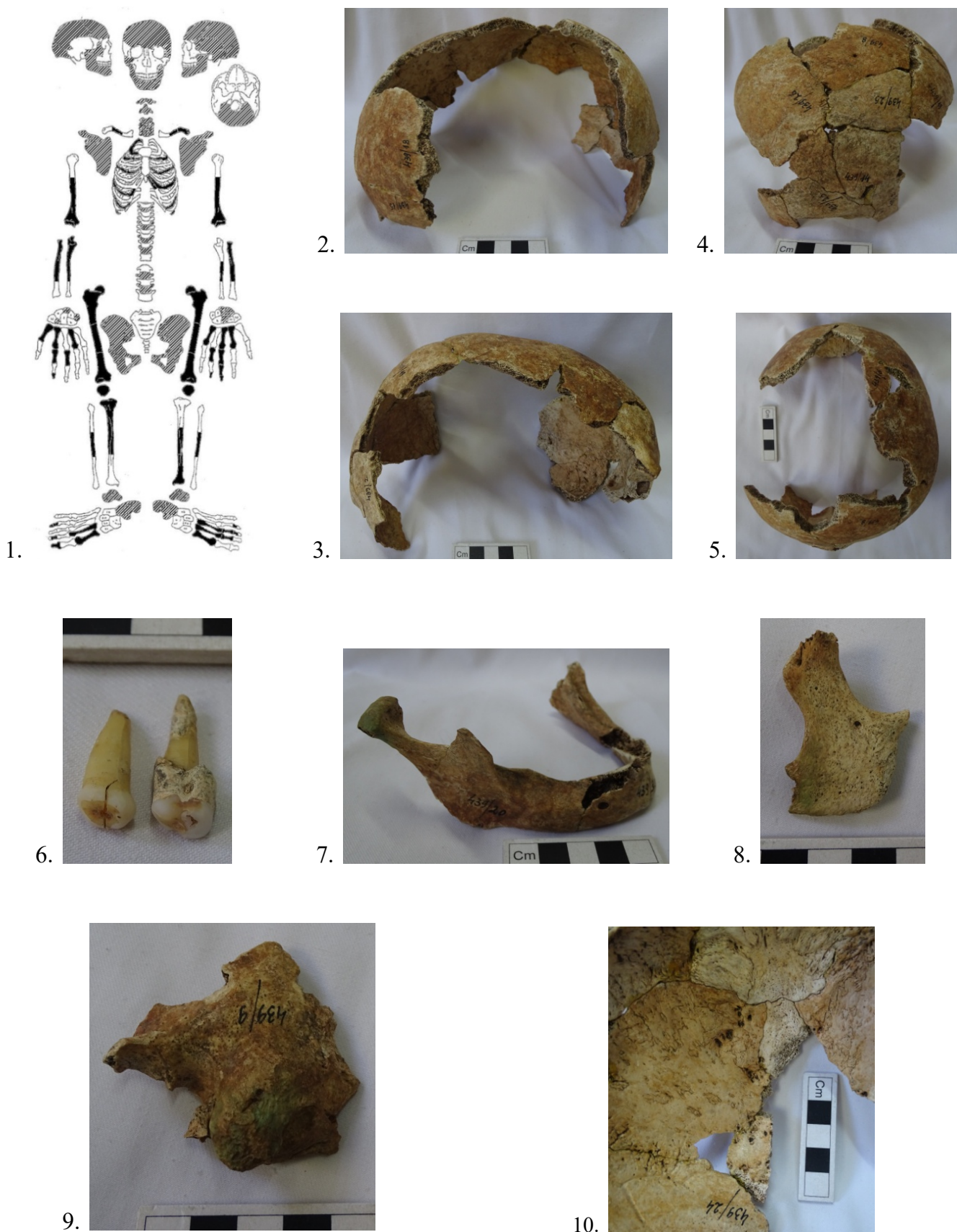
Pl. V. Ripiceni – La Stâncă, ceramic vessels – stray finds (drawings: S. Ciupu; photos © Botoșani County Museum).



PL. VI. Ripiceni – La Stâncă, ceramic vessels – stray finds (drawings: S. Ciupu; photos © Botoșani County Museum).

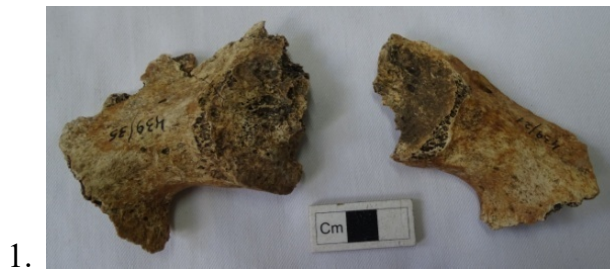


Pl. VII. Analogies. 1 – Ceramic vessel from Mitoc – Malu Galben, grave 2 (after CHIRICA 1979); 2. The vessel from Ripiceni – La Stâncă, grave 1 (after DIACONESCU 2013); 3-4 Beads discovered at Mitoc – Malu Galben, grave 8 (photos © Botoșani County Museum).



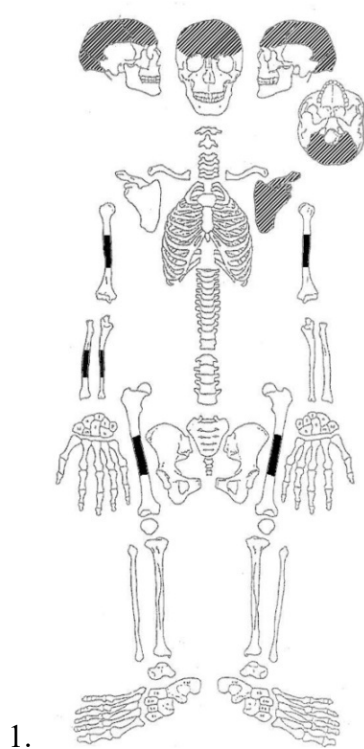
Pl. VIII. Ripiceni-La Stâncă, grave 1/ female, 55-60 years old.

1. Representation state of the skeleton (black – complete; hatched – incomplete; white – absent); **2-3.** Neurocranium, lateral view; **4.** Neurocranium, view from the occipital; **5.** Neurocranium, vertical view; **6.** The right P1 and the left P2 (with calculus); **7.** Mandible, oxidation traces on the right condyle; **8.** The right zygomatic, oxidation traces; **9.** The left mastoid process, oxidation traces; **10.** Frontal, the inner layer, traces of inflammatory process of the meninges.



Pl. IX. Ripiceni-La Stâncă, Grave 1, female, 55-60 years old.

1. The joint surfaces of the coxals with the sacrum, bone degeneration; **2.** The articular surfaces of the coxals with the femurs, degenerative osteoarthritis; **3.** Humeruses, pronounced muscle insertions; **4.** Femurs, posterior view; **5.** The proximal epiphyses of the femurs, degenerative osteoarthritis; **6.** Femurs, diaphyses, pronounced pilastry.



1.

2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.



11.



Pl. X. Ripiceni-La Stâncă, Grave 2, subadult, 2-3 years old.

1. Representation state of the skeleton (black – complete; hatched – incomplete; white – absent); **2-3.** Calvaria, lateral view; **4.** Calvaria, frontal view; **5.** Calvaria, vertical view; **6-7.** Cranial fragments, porotic hyperostosis; **8.** Calvaria, view from the inside, traces of inflammatory process of the meninges; **9.** Scapula, fragment, burn traces; **10.** The right radius and ulna, fragments, burn traces; **11.** Femurs, fragments, burn traces.